

Against the Grain

Volume 27 | Issue 1

Article 30

2015

The Scholarly Publishing Scene: Heavy Lifting Out in the Cold

Myer Kutz

Myer Kutz Associates, Inc., myerkutz@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kutz, Myer (2015) "The Scholarly Publishing Scene: Heavy Lifting Out in the Cold," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 30.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7012>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.



New Products.
New Content.
New Look.

Same Proven Results.

A leading provider
of digital humanities
and social sciences content,
Project MUSE offers books and
journals, from prestigious university presses and scholarly
societies that are fully integrated for search and discovery.
Welcome to a new chapter in scholarly research.

The Trusted Voice In The Scholarly Community.



PROJECT MUSE®

<http://muse.jhu.edu>

The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Heavy Lifting Out in the Cold

Column Editor: **Myer Kutz** (President, Myer Kutz Associates, Inc.) <myerkutz@aol.com>

I was a judge again for the 39th annual **PROSE Awards** (www.proseawards.com), which is sponsored by the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division (PSP) of the **Association of American Publishers (AAP)**. Judging took place on January 7-8 in the AAP's New York offices. Winners were announced on February 5 at a luncheon held during the PSP's annual conference at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, DC. (As I write this column in mid-January, I am not permitted to divulge the award winners, which will be known to the world by the time you're reading this issue of *Against the Grain*.)

Back in the 1980s, while I was running scientific and technical publishing at **Wiley**, I chaired the PSP awards program. For the better part of the past two decades, I've been the judge responsible for the math and hard science categories, including chemistry and physics, astronomy and cosmology, earth science, and environmental science. I'm also the lead judge in the popular science and math category. What being the lead judge means is that I'm the one who recommends to the rest of the judges which title should be the winner and which titles should take

honorable mention in any of the categories for which I'm responsible. (I wrote about the judging process in this column a year ago.) Electronic products, journals and, of course, books are all eligible for the competition. What *that* means is that during the month of November and part of December, **Kate Kolendo**, the estimable **PROSE Awards** staffer, ships many cartons of books to my home in Upstate New York.

Much to my lanky wife **Arlene's** displeasure, the books reside in my study in piles that grow taller as the days grow shorter. This situation came to a head this past fall when I took on the category of multi-volume science reference works. The sheer number of books got out of hand. In fact, **Arlene**, rather imperiously, I thought, put her foot down as soon as I started lugging through the house the first set of these multi-volume reference works I received. I'd asked **Kate** to break up the shipments of the sets, so day after day I would find near the front door a stack of five or six cartons that I had to carry and dump in the garage, which became my default location for judging the entries in this category. As a result, a considerable portion of our garage floor became covered

with cartons of large and very heavy sets of scientific tomes.

Now the **PROSE Awards** team, led by **John Jenkins**, Founder & CEO of **Law Street Media** and a great showman, make a great to-do about the number of entries that publishers — commercial STM houses and university presses mainly, with trade houses now eligible — submit. The overall number has been growing every year, **Kate** doesn't remember whether there were more sets this year than last. No matter: there were more than enough for me — sixteen sets, depending on how I was counting — comprised of over 80 heavy volumes. Did I already say these books were heavy? Well, *pardon me*. You try schlepping them in the Upstate November cold. Or even one volume at a time in a warm, dry library. It's yet another reason you appreciate having these books available over the Internet, where you can get at the contents with your fingertips. Anyway, here's something that might get your attention: the combined list price for the sets was over \$33,000 — equivalent to

continued on page 66



what I paid for the six-cylinder Camry that was sitting in my driveway.

I tried to make sense of the fact that a preponderance of the sets came from a single publisher. A friend, who is not in publishing, theorized that this publisher submitted so many sets in an effort to make as many editors and contributors as possible happy. I didn't buy that explanation. Maybe it was just a case of burying any competitors under a truckload of books.

When I cut open the cartons one afternoon, what struck me, beyond the sheer massiveness of all the sets of reference works in my garage, was that in publishing terms, the sets were all of very high quality. The bindings, boards and paper were all meant for continual usage. There was liberal use of color wherever it made sense. Margins and fonts struck me as generous and in the service of readers, not cramped and stunted to cut down on page counts in dedication to the demands of the bottom line. In short, the publishers of these sets did not scrimp on anything, which is a great selling point when a publisher is trying to attract high achievers with sterling reputations as editors for projects

like these. And the more eminent the editor, the easier it is to get contributors, a task that is becoming increasingly difficult, given the added burdens that are heaped on academics and industry practitioners nowadays.

In this Internet age, it's remarkable to me that publishers engage willingly in what some derisively might call "dead-tree" information dissemination. And even more remarkably, that they invest so much money and effort. Form, it seems to me, exceeds function in the case of the print versions of these massive sets.

It became obvious as I went through the volumes in the cartons that each set tackled an important subject comprehensively. So in judging terms, when I considered the comprehensiveness in tandem with the high production quality, it was hard initially for me find criteria on which I could rank the sets. But not for long. Maybe it was the cold in my unheated garage this past December that helped me reach conclusions expeditiously about the winner and honorable mentions.

The other books I got to judge this fall had, for the most part, the same attributes in terms of production values as the scientific reference sets. Some of them could be called beautiful. This lavishness used to be mainly the province of subsidized books from university presses, but even commercial publishers go all-in on

many books nowadays. Is this willingness on the part of commercial houses to spend money on books, which in some circles are so last-century, or even the one before that, compensation for the financial bounty produced by STM journal publishing, which makes so many people so angry? Don't ask. I'm pretty sure that no one in a position of authority at any STM publisher will give you a straight-faced answer. But I do have my theories, among them a perceived demand felt by publishers that they need to find ways to give back to the STM community some portion of that bounty. It can't all go to the shareholders or into executive salaries without some customer payback. (More about that at some future time.)

I get to keep whatever books strike my fancy, whether or not, **Arlene** sighs, I have room for them on the bookshelves that populate three rooms in our home. Most of the rest I give over to a local college bookstore for charitable distribution. As for all those reference sets in the garage, a local book dealer came by in a late-model station wagon and hauled them away. He took the sets on consignment. If he sells any of them, I'll probably give my half of the money to some pet worthy causes. As for any sets that he doesn't sell, I told him to give them away and under no circumstances return them to me. I don't want to risk a disc problem in my lower back. 🌿

Optimizing Library Services — Location, Location, Location ... Libraries Offer Prime Community Spaces

by **Dr. Abigail G. Scheg** (Elizabeth City State University) <agscheg@ecsu.edu>

Column Editors: **Lindsay Johnston** (Managing Director, IGI Global) <ljohnston@igi-global.com>

and **Kristen Stauffer** (Director of Electronic Resources & Library Relations, IGI Global) <kstauffer@igi-global.com>

In Fall 2014, I, along with **Shelley Rodrigo**, and **Mary Beth Pennington** from **Old Dominion University**, hosted a community writing workshop on campus at **Elizabeth City State University (ECSU)**. Originally, our idea was to have an open concept time and space for individuals from different institutions, and just around the community, to come together for a specified period of time solely to work on writing projects. This would not be a formal gathering, or an organized workshop or discussion. Instead, it would be what all individuals with a writing project need: time, space, quiet, and support. In our original promotion shared with faculty, staff, and students at different institutions, as well as community members, I stated that I would be available to talk about writing projects with anyone that wanted a sounding board. However, most of the time would be spent quietly, and individually, tackling our writing projects.

Since we wanted this idea to be so broad and inviting, we thought that it would be best suited for a community space — something not affiliated with one of our institutions. But, as

a new venture, we had little time, uncertainty of interest, and zero budget. We discussed community gathering spaces that we could plead with to waive a rental fee. We discussed just taking over a coffee shop or a Panera, but decided against it since we didn't know how many people we would have. We discussed a community library space, but found that became too problematic due to their limited hours on a weekend. Finally, we decided that **ECSU's** campus provided a good venue, and a central location for the invitations sent to individuals and institutions in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina. Although I would have had access and approval to use my campus classroom and office building to hold this workshop, it lacked a central space that was sufficient for this purpose: close enough that individuals could find one another and talk if need be, but not a small enough space so that we are all sitting together at a table to work on our projects. Instead, we decided that **ECSU's G.R. Little Library** would provide a good space for this purpose, and give writers access to library materials should they want to utilize

any of them in the time that they were there.

The library space turned out to be an incredibly productive location for the writers who attended this workshop. The workshop was scheduled for a Saturday, and just a few weeks before the workshop, **ECSU** announced that the library would be closed on the weekends because of budget cuts. The workshop was still held, but because it was otherwise closed, it was a quiet and focused area for writers. Some writers chose tucked away nook-like desks to record their ideas. Others used the couches, and lounged as they wrote and reflected. Others, myself included, staked out a large table where I could spread out all of the items in my traveling work kit: notes, resources, laptop, coffee, and water bottle. We were close enough that someone could find me if they had a question about the space or the resources, but separate enough that we were all able to identify a place where we felt the most comfortable and productive. And the possibilities of libraries as tremendous assets for community space came to light.

continued on page 67